

September 14, 2002

Betraying the Foreign Victims

Shockingly, many of those who were grieving the loss of a loved one at ground zero on Wednesday are now subject to deportation. Congress ought to rectify this unconscionable situation immediately. It should grant the hundreds of family members of lawfully employed foreigners who perished in last September's terrorist attacks the right to reside in the United States, regardless of when their original visas expired. It would also be fitting to honor the foreign casualties of this attack on American soil by offering citizenship to any of their dependents who wish it.

These families are dealing with the same haunting administrative burdens as those of other victims, including the difficult process of applying for support from the victims' compensation fund. Some are still seeking to have their loved ones' remains identified. To force these people to worry, on top of all else, about the risk of sudden deportation amounts to a monumental lapse in America's traditional compassion and generosity. Immigration officials are quick to say they won't rush to pursue these families, but an invitation to take their chances is not much comfort.

As part of last year's Patriot Act, Congress did allow these survivors to remain in the country beyond the terms of their visas if they had expired, but only until this Sept. 11. Senator Jon Corzine, the New Jersey Democrat, has been trying to get another one-year extension passed in the Senate, but the measure has fallen victim to broader partisan wrangling on unrelated matters. Republican leaders in both chambers of Congress need to intervene so that these grieving families can stop worrying about their immigration status.